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## Third Committee

**Summary record of the 4th meeting**
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Monday, 7 October 2003, at 10 a.m.

*Chairman:* Mr. Belinga-Eboutou ..... (Cameroon)

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*The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.*

**Agenda item 105: Implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development and of the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly** (*continued*) (A/58/172, A/58/204)

**Agenda item 106: Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family** (*continued*) (A/58/3, A/58/61–E/2003/5, A/58/67–E/2003/49, A/58/79, A/58/229, A/58/159, A/58/153 and AC.3/58/L.2)

**Agenda item 107: Follow-up to the International Year of Older Persons: Second World Assembly on Ageing** (*continued*) (A/58/160)

1. **Mr. Manalo** (Philippines), stressing that there could be no genuine development without social integration, said that, despite an abundance of economic and social policies concerning almost all aspects of development, the need to ensure that those policies were integrated and comprehensive, targeting both economic and social objectives, had not been adequately responded to. He also emphasized that economic growth and social progress were interdependent and that the Philippines remained committed to alleviating poverty, promoting full employment and securing social integration – endeavours that required the participation of all actors concerned.

2. The Philippine delegation welcomed resolution 57/270 B on the integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic and social fields and in related areas, adopted by the General Assembly in June 2003. That resolution had put into focus the need to integrate social development objectives, particularly the Millennium Development Goals, in conferences and summits, and had helped to define the role of the Member States, the organizations of the United Nations system and civil society in ensuring the coordinated implementation of global commitments. The General Assembly had resolved to promote consistency and complementarity in the work of the General Assembly Plenary, Second and Third Committees. In that regard, account should be taken of their respective mandates and contexts of work. It would be useful if the two Committees continued to exchange information on selected issues and jointly identified how best to proceed in integrating policies that targeted both social and economic goals. The Plenary, where the agenda items were discussed from various perspectives, remained the main General Assembly body.

3. Regarding social development concerns, the speaker said that, to prepare for the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family, his Government had established a national steering committee on the Philippine family to undertake activities and programmes upholding the importance of the family, traditionally viewed in Philippine society as the main caregiver for older persons, youth and persons with disabilities. Over and above Philippine legislation and the programmes supporting the Philippine action plan for the family, which aimed at strengthening the stability of the family and addressed concerns such as familial responsibilities and domestic violence, the Philippine government was currently studying the establishment of a national Council on the Philippine family.

4. Regarding the implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, the Philippine delegation noted that the regional commissions had taken a more active role in guiding the various countries on policies and the implementation of their respective programmes. The Philippines had actively contributed on a regional scale to the follow-up to the Second World Assembly on Ageing through the Asia-Pacific Seminar organized in Shanghai by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) on the regional follow-up to the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing and to the Macao Plan of Action on Ageing for Asia and the Pacific. The assistance provided would tangibly address existing needs, particularly of developing countries.

5. By fostering partnerships with civil society, particularly self-reliance and advocacy groups, the Philippine Constitution and the Philippine Plan of Action for Older Persons encouraged the elderly to take on a larger role in nation building.

6. The Philippines stood committed to ensure full protection and promotion of human rights for all,

including disabled persons, whose rights and well-being could be recognized and protected only through actual equality and justice; and to contribute, by exchanging information and support in capacity building, to implementing the commitments made at the Second World Assembly on Ageing.

7. Referring to the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons and the United Nations Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, the speaker said that his country would update the resolution entitled "Implementation of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons: towards a society for all in the twenty-first century" and encouraged all delegations to participate in the negotiations. The Philippine delegation hoped that the final resolution would be adopted early and by consensus.

8. The Philippine Government had set up a multi-sectoral committee on the international human-development commitment, composed of government and non-government representatives and responsible for monitoring the country's progress in meeting social commitments.

9. **Ms. Bakalem** (Algeria) stated that her delegation supported the declaration made on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

10. Recalling the social objectives that the international community had set and the efforts that each country should make to improve the living conditions of its population, the speaker stressed that the developed countries should help those most in need to face the problems encountered. Since globalization did not only offer possibilities but also caused difficulties, the attainment of internationally agreed social-development objectives and commitments required forming specific strong partnerships between developed and developing countries.

11. The Algerian economy had suffered, and was beginning to recover from the consequences of a decade of terrorism and of various natural disasters. Programmes of support for such employment-generating sectors as construction, agriculture and fishing, and a special programme for building local infrastructure, such as schools, and re-housing disaster victims, had begun to produce results. The Algerian delegation thanked the countries, bodies and civil society organizations for the assistance and aid that they had promptly provided.

12. To promote employment and curb unemployment, loans were extended on favourable terms for setting up small- and medium-size enterprises, while micro-credits and tax exemptions were available to young persons entering the labour market. The Algerian State strongly encouraged the establishment of cooperatives as a means of promoting social-development objectives. Accordingly, it funded pilot cooperatives and encouraged women to set up artisan cooperatives in order to improve their economic status. Aid provided to vulnerable categories for housing acquisition was sought after extensively.

13. In view of a declining fertility rate, an ageing population, poverty and unemployment, the family, which was society's basic unit, needed reinforcement through the broadest possible protection and assistance.

14. Population ageing was already having a social impact, particularly for intra-family relations, and was expected to lead to economic consequences, affecting growth, savings, the labour market, retirement pensions and the health sector, and to the need for extensive readjustments. It should be noted that older people contributed to society by imparting knowledge and experience to the young generations or, as in Africa, by playing an important role for children who were HIV/AIDS victims.

15. Algeria had set up a national committee for the protection and welfare of older people. In April 2003, the committee had adopted a work programme for keeping older people in their family environment as a measure intended to safeguard human dignity.

16. Algeria reiterated its support for negotiating a Comprehensive and Integral International Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities.

17. **Mr. Chowdhury** (Bangladesh), in his capacity as Chair of the Second Committee, was looking forward to the Second and Third Committees' coordinated efforts, already set in process, to advance their common aspirations.

18. The Secretary-General's report (A/58/172) on the follow-up of the recommendations of the 41st session of the Commission for Social Development, which the representative of Bangladesh had also chaired, was focused in particular on the consistency of policies to promote social development. Bangladesh believed that social development was basically a national responsibility, but could not be fully achieved without significant international support, which should include the propagation of a culture of peace and conflict prevention and a favourable external economic environment. Participation and partnership were two further vital elements. Civil society's active involvement and its cooperation with governments were also essential.

19. The Bangladeshi Government held the view that pluralism, democracy, good governance, human rights, gender equity and women's empowerment were indispensable to social development and was promoting a positive societal transformation in the country.

20. With regard to youth, Bangladesh had launched in 1978 an action plan for the employment of young persons and established in 1981 a Ministry for Youth and Sports, and a Youth Directorate. In 2003, it had adopted a national youth policy. It consequently welcomed the current initiatives taken by the United Nations system to promote youth employment.

21. The family, being the basic social unit, played a vital role in Bangladesh. The country was therefore looking forward to the celebration, in December 2003, of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family.

22. Concerning older persons, Bangladesh shared the views of the Secretary-General that an "ageing perspective" needed to be considered in the work programmes of the United Nations system. A coordinated effort should be undertaken by the Commission for Social Development and the Commission on the Status of Women as part of the implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing. Furthermore, governments had a responsibility to integrate the issue of older women into their policies.

23. Programmes for the aged population launched by Bangladesh included social security and welfare measures (such as old-age pension, allowance for widows, and homes for the abandoned, dispossessed and disabled). Geriatric issues had been addressed in the country's five-year plan.

24. The Ministry of Social Welfare of Bangladesh had been entrusted with the responsibility of implementing and executing the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing. In particular, it endeavoured to reduce poverty among rural elderly people. The Government had introduced an old age allowances programme with a total of one million beneficiaries every year.

25. Bangladesh welcomed the decision of the Ad hoc Committee on a Comprehensive and Integral International Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities to establish a working group that would prepare a draft text as a basis for negotiation and was expected to present the outcome of its work to the Ad hoc Committee in 2004. Bangladesh had adopted a national policy for persons with disabilities and a national work plan for implementing that policy. The Government was cooperating closely with civil society organizations to provide education, training, economic opportunity and rehabilitation programmes for the disabled. A Disability Welfare Act had been enacted in 2001.

26. The major United Nations conferences of the 1990s had laid down the path to tread. The commitments that were made, if they were to be fulfilled, required persistent and consistent action and a coordinated and integrated follow-up to those conferences. To that purpose, it was necessary to continue to strengthen the work of the United Nations, and increase the effectiveness of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and its commissions, particularly the Commission for Social Development. All countries together, at the United Nations, should bring development centre stage, place people at the centre of development and recommit to strengthened and effective international and regional cooperation, partnership and assistance.

27. **Mr. Gzilal** (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) said that his country associated itself with the statement made the

previous day by Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and reflected the positions of the Group on social development.

28. Responsibility for social development rested mainly with the countries themselves. They should ensure the existence of favourable conditions, a prerequisite for international cooperation, whose role was to support national activities aimed at meeting commitments made under the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly.

29. The debt, export hindrances, the reduction of official development aid (ODA) and unilateral sanctions were some of the external factors causing the problems experienced by the countries concerned. The social situation of those countries, especially in Africa, was steadily deteriorating, as pandemics compounded the other difficulties. The international community should honour its commitments and provide the assistance necessary for the on-going efforts in the social and economic areas, which were two sides of the same coin, as the Secretary-General had stressed in his report on the issue (A/58/172). Social progress was possible only if the economic conditions improved, and economic stability depended on social stability.

30. Although progress had been achieved in the area of social development, many countries had not yet met the expectations of their population. It was therefore necessary to boost international efforts to curb the negative impact of globalization and reduce poverty. At the same time, developing countries should promote a culture of peace to prevent the proliferation of armed and ethnic conflicts; endeavour to bring about peace and development; and prevent the formation of industrial monopolies under the pretext of globalization. The above impact on developing economies was powerful and the situation would only worsen if the necessary remedial measures were not taken.

31. The international character of social development required that all stakeholders, including the private sector and civil society, should participate in the process. Moreover, partnerships between industrialized and developing countries were an important factor and the Libyan delegation recalled in that connection that the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) had been set up to help to treat the social aspects of development in Africa within the context of international development. The success of that initiative depended on the actual intentions and the political will of the NEPAD partners.

32. The Libyan Arab Jamahiriya spared no effort to ensure an appropriate use of its natural and human resources and the adoption of economic and social policies that, through the full participation of all, maintained a balance between the needs of the individual within society and the needs of society. National development objectives were ambitious and part of a plan that underscored education, health and the formulation of strategic projects focusing on industry, agriculture and the water sector (a pertinent example was a recently completed artificial-river project).

33. The Libyan Government attached great importance to youth, for which many training and professional-qualification projects had been launched. Libya viewed training young persons in the latest technologies as a way of ensuring that the trainees would become active members of society, responsible for its future shape. Intergenerational relations should be strengthened, keeping in mind that older persons would constitute a sizeable group in the middle of the 21st century and that it was still possible to forestall the impact of ageing if the necessary measures were taken as of now in accordance with the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing.

34. Today's materialist society undermined the values on which the family was based. Marital relations became commercial partnerships, and young people, disconcerted, questioned the existing values and habits. It was therefore necessary to renew the significance of the family, society's cornerstone. In that connection, like other delegations, the Libyan delegation failed to understand why the Family Unit had been eliminated. It considered the Secretariat's explanations insufficient and unconvincing, especially in view of the forthcoming observance of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family, and hoped that no such hasty decisions would be taken in the future.

35. Persons with disabilities were another group whose potential should be used in promoting development and whose rights needed protection.

Accordingly, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya welcomed the outcome of the second meeting of the Ad hoc Committee on a Comprehensive and Integral International Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities.

36. **Ms. Tomar** (India) said that the Under Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs had rightly focused on the core challenge before the international community as one of ensuring growth that was equitable, inclusive, pro-development and supportive of equality between men and women. She added that her delegation associated itself with the statement made by Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

37. The Secretary-General's report on the World Social Situation, 2003 (A/58/153) starkly reminded the international community that 1.2 billion people lived in absolute poverty and that "a lack of policies and measures to bring people living on the margins of society into the mainstream" could only be seen as "a major policy failure of the Governments of all countries", whether developed, developing or in transition. It also pointed out that the aims of the World Summit for Social Development were a long way from becoming a reality. For example, 51 percent of the Sub-Saharan African population still lived on less than US$1 per day; 113 million children of primary school-age (94 per cent of them in developing countries) were not enrolled in school; and 3 million children were infected with HIV/AIDS. Those figures were only some reminders that the international community had not adequately seized the gravity of the situation.

38. A basic premise of the Secretary-General's report was that "all groups face vulnerabilities that are largely the outcome of economic, social and cultural barriers that restrict opportunities for and impede the social integration and participation of the members of the group". That assumption was somewhat simplistic. Actually, eliminating "barriers" was not sufficient for solving problems stemming from "economic, social and cultural situations".

39. Accordingly, since gaining its independence, India had spared no efforts to improve the social situation of its population. It had focused on health, education and employment. As a result, the proportion of the population below the poverty line had declined from 55 percent in 1973-74 to 26 percent in 1999-2000 and the literacy rate had risen from 18 percent in 1951 to 65 percent in 2001. The Planning Commission of India, entrusted with planning for India's socio-economic development, recognized that "the focus of policy for reducing poverty in the country" would "have to be on reducing the vulnerability of the poor". Health and education were identified as key areas that need to be addressed by the Commission.

40. Poverty eradication remained a national responsibility. However, as the Prime Minister of India had pointed out in his recent address to the United Nations General Assembly, poverty eradication required resources on a far greater scale than that on which they were currently available and therefore a strengthened international cooperation. The Indian delegation would welcome an analytical assessment by the Division for Social Policy and Development on the critical nature of greater international assistance for the successful achievement of social development objectives in developing countries.

41. Progressive poverty-reduction and social development also required policies focused on young people, who would shape the future of the country. Over the last 30 years, several initiatives for rural youth had been adopted and were being successfully implemented. Professional training and employment were the main areas of focus in the tenth five-year plan, which was being implemented. The evolution of the political system had led to greater and better participation of the people of India in the political process, and that fact contributed to social development. The "Panchayati Raj" system had revolutionized grass-road administration: the affairs of each village were now managed by an elected council of five, responsible inter alia for implementing development programmes.

42. Under agenda item 107, the Indian representative referred to the road map suggested in the Secretary-General's report on the follow-up to the Second World Assembly on Ageing (A/58/160) for the implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing. The concept was innovative and would need to be adapted to suit different national situations. In 1999, India had adopted a national policy

for older persons, which took a comprehensive view of the needs of the aged. A five-year plan of action for 2000–2005 was currently being implemented. While the population of India was comparatively young, India was expected to have 100 million elderly persons by the year 2013. That was a challenge that would require special attention, because approximately 80 per cent of that population, consisting mainly of women, would be in rural areas and 30 per cent below the poverty line.

43. **Ms. Radi** (Bahrain), referring to agenda item 106, welcomed the outcome of the second meeting of the Ad hoc Committee on a Comprehensive and Integral International Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities. She pointed out that, since gaining its independence in 1971, Bahrain had taken many measures in favour of the social integration and adaptation of persons with disabilities, for instance the establishment of a handicapped children's home by the National Bank of Bahrain. Generally speaking, the services provided to persons with disabilities focused on education, health care, culture, and social and economic protection. Many legal entities with a national scope had been set up for the disabled, including a national foundation, a sports committee and an international mobility centre. More than two thirds of the national centres catering to persons with disabilities were establishments connected to civil society.

44. The Government had drawn up plans and set objectives aimed at upholding the rights of persons with disabilities. In particular, it took measures to improve their access to public buildings and facilities and to facilitate their circulation. Several laws had been enacted to penalize the most frequent forms of discrimination against them. Sign-language interpretation in daily news telecasts was becoming more frequent and services available to disabled persons were being computerized in line with the Secretary-General's recommendations in the Review and Appraisal of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons (A/58/61-E/2003/5).

45. Lastly, the Government had set up mobile units providing health care to disabled persons at home. Nevertheless, it was necessary to further strengthen the protection of persons with disabilities at the legal level and an energetic policy should be implemented in cooperation with the competent bodies. It was also important to make further training available to service providers.

46. The involvement of the private sector had become necessary at the financial and other levels. Many private actors were providing medical diagnosis and treatment, housing, vocational training and leisure activities for persons with disabilities with a view to promoting equal opportunities for the disabled and ensuring their integration into the educational system and the labour market. Decree No. 23/1976 recognized the disabled persons' right to work in accordance with the International Labour Office Convention on Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (Disabled Persons) (No. 159, 1983).

47. **Mr. Israfilov** (Azerbaijan), referring to agenda item 106, said that his delegation valued the quality of the Secretary-General's report on the World Social Situation, 2003 (A/58/153), but would appreciate it if in future such reports were distributed in time. Furthermore, it failed to understand why, in explanatory notes to that report, his country and other East European economies in transition were referred to as the "former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics". The Republic of Azerbaijan had established its sovereignty in 1991 and become a full-fledged member of the United Nations in 1992. The Azerbaijani delegation would therefore appreciate it, if the Secretariat would not resort to stereotypes of the past to describe Azerbaijan but designated it using the official name of the country or the regional group to which it belonged.

48. In the area of social and economic reform, Azerbaijan implemented a results-based policy aimed at economic growth, social progress, stability and a high standard of living. Since 1966, more than 30 decrees had been issued with a view to improving social protection for the entire population. A small- and medium-size enterprise development programme and the 2003–2005 poverty-reduction and economic-development programme had been approved in 2002 and 2003, respectively. The second of these programmes was in line with commitments made under the Millennium Declaration and the decisions adopted during the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly.

49. Unfortunately, despite the results so far achieved and the macroeconomic reforms launched by the Government since 1996, the population's standard of living had not improved, the unemployment rate remained high, and the minimum wage was insufficient.

50. The situation was aggravated by the consequences of the unresolved armed conflict with Armenia, which were still a matter of grave concern to Azerbaijan. Nearly 800,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs), victims of that conflict, had been compelled to leave more than 300,000 jobs in the Azerbaijani territories occupied by Armenia. Legislation had been enacted to regulate the legal status of that vulnerable group and ensure its social protection. Related measures were also being taken under the State programme on refugee and IDP issues, which had been adopted in 1998.

51. For more than a decade, Azerbaijan had successfully cooperated with almost all United Nations institutions and specialized agencies dealing with social issues. Its Government hoped that the United Nations would eventually pay particular attention to the social problems of victims of protracted conflicts and to persons with disabilities due to armed conflicts. It very much counted on the support and assistance provided by the international community to enable Azerbaijan to cope with social problems faced by that vulnerable group. It went without saying that the resolution of the ongoing conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia would soon lead to a long-term solution to refugee and IDP issues. The Azerbaijani Government, having limited resources for assisting refugees and displaced persons, was extremely interested in learning about relevant best practices and the kind of expertise available from the United Nations and its Member States for addressing those issues.

52. The armed conflict had led to the emergence of new problems for youth. The number of young people with disabilities, of one- parent families and of orphans had increased significantly. Bearing in mind those factors, the Government had adopted a number of programmes on key issues: youth employment; housing and health care, especially for young people demobilized from the army; support for young families; and the establishment of a system of benefits and social security and insurance for youth. The Azerbaijani delegation was pleased to note that Azerbaijan had been included, along with seven other countries, in the Secretary-General's youth employment network. Strengthening dialogue among the network members and international institutions involved would ensure the success of the initiative.

53 Azerbaijan had actively participated in the Second World Assembly on Ageing, held in Madrid in April 2002, and in the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Ministerial Conference on Ageing, held in Berlin in September 2002; and was currently revising its 1999 national plan of action on ageing and aligning it with the Madrid strategy with a view to the implementation of commitments made under the final documents of those high-level meetings. It had also taken appropriate measures to strengthen the social security for older persons and was reforming the pension system through the establishment of a private pension scheme. On October 1 of each year, Azerbaijan celebrated the Day of Older Persons.

54. The Government promoted the rehabilitation of persons with disabilities, focusing on their social integration as part of a health-care system reform. The representative of Azerbaijan added that his country attached particular importance to the Family Unit and believed that, on the basis of a reasonable timetable, it should be strengthened with the means and expertise necessary for preparing the observance of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family.

55. **Mr. Myrstad** (Norway), youth representative of his country, referring to agenda item 106, regretted that too few youth representatives participated in the debates, although young people constituted one fifth of the world population and should therefore have a say in decision-making at the local, national and international levels. Youth understood youth and youth communicated with youth: consequently, youth participation could lead to better outcomes, for example in Africa where the involvement of youth organizations had led to more efficient ways of raising awareness of HIV/AIDS.

56. According to the World Youth Report, 2003 (E/CN.5/2000 3/4), more than 300,000 children (a child being, according to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, any human being under 18), many of

them abducted, were fighting in armed conflicts in 49 countries. Some were even forced to kill friends and family members. Girls were even more vulnerable than boys. According to the report, more than two million children had been killed in armed conflicts during the last decade. Young people therefore urged all parties using children as soldiers to try to solve the conflicts peacefully. They also urged all countries to ratify and comply with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, incorporate its provisions into their natural law, ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, support the International Criminal Court, combat impunity by furthering the rule of law and exercise strict control over the legal proliferation of light weapons, which fuelled conflicts and turned children into killing machines. They also urged that all peace negotiations should include specific measures to demobilize child soldiers and reintegrate them into society.

57. The fact that it was much easier to raise funds for war and military budgets than for conflict prevention and poverty reduction explained why young people lost hope in the future of peace, cooperation and sustainable development. The representative stressed that the world had not been inherited from the parents but had been borrowed from the children.

58. **Ms. Maw** (Myanmar), referring to agenda item 107, said that her delegation associated itself with the statement made on the previous day by Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. Older persons (whose number was growing rapidly in the world), with the wealth of traditional knowledge and survival strategies that they had accumulated over a lifetime of experience, made an immense contribution to their families and communities.

59. By adopting, at the Second World Assembly on Ageing, the Political Declaration and the Madrid International Plan of Action (which focused on ageing in developing countries), the international community had reaffirmed its commitment to work towards the establishment of a society for all ages.

60. Myanmar welcomed the fact that, in the implementation of the Madrid Plan of Action during the first year of the follow-up to the Second World Assembly on Ageing, progress had been visible in such areas as intergovernmental process, interagency activities, regional activities, research and information dissemination, as it was stated in the Secretary-General's report (A/58/160).

61. The implementation of the Madrid Plan of Action was an evolving process that required sustained action at all levels and involved challenges that could not be met without substantial support from developed countries.

62. In Myanmar, older people, who in 2003 represented 8.1 percent of the total population, were highly regarded. Elderly persons received care from their extended family. For those who did not have one, religious and voluntary organizations had established homes for the aged, subsidized by the State.

63. Elderly persons continued to lead an active life in society through their involvement in civil societies, voluntary organizations and trade and commerce. Myanmar was aware of the need, recognized in the Madrid Plan of Action for Ageing, to mainstream the issue of ageing into the development agenda.

64. **Mr. Klang** (Sweden), youth representative of his country, said that close to 40 percent of the world's population were under 25. As receivers of the generational torch, youth could be responsible agents for substantial social change. Young people were an essential part of the solution – not the problem.

65. The major objectives of the United Nations could be realized only if the international community responded to the needs of young people and supported their actions and initiatives. Inclusion of young people and youth-led organizations was a fundamental question of strengthening democracy and making use of untapped resources in attaining the Millennium Development Goals. Sweden therefore strongly encouraged all nations to include youth delegates of both genders in future national delegations to the General Assembly and other essential formal arenas.

66. There were youth movements all over the world. Young people should be full-fledged partners, and the States could involve them in a number of activities, such as combating HIV/AIDS, educational reform, attaining the Millennium Development Goals or empowering women. Society stood to gain by

acknowledging the role that young people could play, supporting them and listening to them.

67. **Mr. Skinnebach** (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies) said that the issues examined by the Commission were very important to the work of all National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and their International Federation.

68. Three aspects of social development – ageing, voluntarism and youth – would be core issues of particular relevance to the International Conference of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent, in which all governments would be participating in December 2003. The theme of the International Conference, "Protecting Human Dignity", was strongly linked to social development.

69. Virtually all Red Cross and Red Crescent national societies were engaged in community care projects. That included programmes for the ageing, where trained volunteers were working, and programmes for aged volunteers, a proof that older people's contribution to society could be of value.

70. The Federation hoped that governments, in partnership with civil society, would actively involve themselves in volunteer programmes that it mainstreamed into its activities and brought forward within appropriate settings in such areas as disaster preparedness, disaster response and health and community care. It also hoped to see stronger evidence of cooperation on those issues between the various organizations of the United Nations system. It was time that volunteerism, such as the work of United Nations Volunteers, should receive wider recognition from the various agencies.

71. Social development, a core issue in the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals, was also a foundation for building prosperous societies, capable of making a strong contribution to world prosperity and peace.

72. A link among those various aspects of social development was made at the International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Youth Coalition for Peace and Friendship, held at Shiraz, Islamic Republic of Iran in September 2003. The Conference, a significant manifestation of the capacity of youth to deliver, had also adopted a declaration recommending inter alia the integration of peace and friendship into the capacity-building programmes of all countries.

73. The President of the Federation and the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs had recently discussed actual and potential links between the Federation and the Department concerning support for social development initiatives focused on vulnerable communities.

74. The Federation encouraged both governments and the competent bodies of the United Nations system to support communities in their efforts towards sustainable development of their own environment. An example of such local initiatives was offered by Afghanistan, where nearly 3,000 young Afghans were working as Red Crescent volunteers, delivering first aid services to their school peers, providing basic health and sanitation services to their neighbours and building respect for humanitarian values.

75. In Nepal, the Red Cross managed youth programmes aimed at eradicating illiteracy and increasing school enrolment. Because of their positive and lasting impact on the empowerment of women, those programmes provided a lead to the public authorities and international bodies working in the same areas.

76. The Red Cross and Red Crescent societies' function as auxiliaries to the public authorities in the humanitarian area was well known within the United Nations and among most governments. But that role, if its power were to be properly utilized, should be better understood at all levels of government.

77. The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Conference in December 2003 was expected to energize a more productive debate in the meeting of the Commission for Social Development in February 2004 and in other United Nations fora in the years to come.

78. **Mr. Stanislaus** (Granada) expressed appreciation for the speeches of the youth representatives of Norway and Sweden. Probably the only participant over 80, he said that older persons should live on good terms with young people, because if the ideals and energy of youth combined with the experience and the

wisdom of old age, the world would be better for everybody. Rather than reject aged persons, their knowledge and experience should be viewed as sources of enrichment. Furthermore, the young and the old had to live together within the family, society's basic unit. The fact that many grandparents had become parents to children orphaned as a result of the HIV/AIDS epidemic was one example of the positive role that older persons could play.

*The meeting rose at 11.40 a.m.*